



THE NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

# Reviewing Stand

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

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### **Are the Public Schools Doing their Job?**

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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THE REVIEWING STAND is a weekly radio forum presented by Northwestern University. The program was first broadcast by Station WGN, Chicago, October 14, 1934. It has been on the air continuously since that time, originating in the WGN studios, and, since 1935, carried by stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System. THE REVIEWING STAND presents members of the Northwestern University faculty and distinguished guests from business, government, education, and the press in round table discussions of contemporary problems—the questions that are in the news. The program is under the direction of James H. McBurney, Dean of the School of Speech, Northwestern University, and Miss Myrtle Stahl, Director of Educational Programs, WGN, Chicago.

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# Are the Public Schools

## Doing their Job?

MR. MCBURNEY: Gentlemen, the public schools have a tremendous job to do, and I think for the most part, we will agree they are doing it well, often under serious handicaps. By 1957 we are told we shall have ten million more children in the schools than we had in 1947, and need 330,000 additional teachers. Today we will discuss a number of issues affecting the work of the schools in their day by day contacts with our children, issues with which all parents and teachers should be concerned. It is sometimes claimed, Michael, that the schools are not doing as effective a job as they used to do in teaching fundamentals—writing, reading, spelling, arithmetic and the like. Do you think this is the case?

### Fundamentals Plus'

MR. MICHAEL: I think we are doing an effective job in teaching the fundamentals. That we could do a more effective job, I don't believe there is any question.

Teaching of fundamentals always remains one of our primary objectives. There are others. In other words, it is teaching fundamentals plus. Other than the ones you mentioned, I think we would also have to add to the list of fundamentals the ability to speak effectively, ability to listen discriminately, and certainly intelligently. Those are just two that I would add to the list you mentioned.

MR. MCBURNEY: What is your view on this, Christensen?

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I think there isn't much doubt that in mere teaching, teaching the ability to read and write, the schools have done a job. That is, the rate of illiteracy between the two World Wars was reduced by about one-half. But I doubt very much whether the schools today and the

people they do educate are doing as good a job in training accuracy in the fundamentals. I don't think there is any valid evidence to show our children have as good basic understanding of arithmetic or are as accurate spellers or as quick and accurate readers as they were. Part of this undoubtedly comes from the necessity of mass education, which has resulted in having to lower the standards quite generally.

### Comparison With Past

MR. MCSWAIN: I think the schools today, generally, are doing as good a job in teaching the fundamentals as has been the case in past years. Schools vary, of course, in terms of teachers, but all the research studies we have, which are somewhat limited in scope, show that children are reading just as well today. They are spelling just as well. They are doing their arithmetic just as well. The school is trying to improve the quality of thinking that children are doing when they are using the fundamentals.

MR. HELM: I think that one of the problems is the fact that they bring in so many extra studies, and the result is that the time for drill in the classroom and for emphasis upon these reading, writing and arithmetic activities that are so important in later life, is cut down. And it is also a fact that many parents feel they have to spend more time than necessary, and keep the children up later than necessary, in helping them in the drill at home because of the fact the drill is not so thorough in the classroom itself.

MR. MCBURNEY: Helm is saying here the schools are failing to drill the children in these fundamentals to which we are referring.

**MR. MCSWAIN:** That is one of the criticisms that you hear expressed by many people. However, I am sure that the schools are just as much concerned about helping children to develop mental abilities in using the fundamentals. We now know that it is much better to get meaning before you go to drill. With meaning the drill is more and more meaningful practice. Drill alone doesn't educate. You have to get meaning first.

**MR. CHRISTENSEN:** I don't like to disagree with an educator in his own field, but drill serves an end in and of itself. There have been too many of our elementary schools that have tried to "sugar-coat" learning for children and have tried to inculcate in them the idea that life is pleasant and merry and non-competitive. There is something in having a child know that there are certain things in life that are just work and drudgery. That training has been missed in many of our schools.

### Make Education Easy?

**MR. MCSWAIN:** I think many people think that the schools today are trying to make education easy for children and are letting children do as they please and so on, but these accusations are without foundation. All we are trying to do is give the child the benefit of research and psychology, and we do know that learning is hard work, and unless it is adapted to the meaning level of children, they do not get the development we want them to have.

**MR. MICHAEL:** I would like to substantiate what Dean McSwain says. I think there is one thing we know about the secondary school level and that is the student who comes to us satisfied with his experience in his elementary school, along certainly with basic mastery of skills, is the student by and large that we can work with in developing a program for him at the secondary school level; in other words, one who is well adjusted, who likes to go to school, who likes his teachers, without any refer-

ence to, as Mr. Christensen said, a "sugar-coated" type of education.

**MR. HELM:** I think the problem, whether we make it too easy—as Mr. Christensen said, learn the lazy way—depends a great deal upon the principals. I have found that out from discussion with some friends of mine who have been in public school work. Some principals in the schools demand a higher standard of drilling and so forth. Certain teachers who were brought up perhaps when drill was more the custom will see that their students have that type of drill also. Others who have been brought up in the more modern system will probably like the movie and radio idea more, but as a business man, I will have to say that I—and I think many others—am disappointed at the sort of knowledge that comes to us in the finished product of the schools.

### Scientific Research

**MR. MCSWAIN:** The thing that interested me, Mr. Helm, as I know business—I know very little about business in general—is that the men in business are willing to accept scientific research, to improve their products, and yet, many of those are unwilling to grant to children the benefits of scientific research in the field of psychology. This matter of drill has to be re-interpreted in terms of what we know about how children learn.

**MR. CHRISTENSEN:** I don't think that you can properly compare scientific research in the abstract sciences and alleged scientific research that these educators are giving us in many fields in the growth and development of a human being. The learning process is the same today as it was in the days of Aristotle and all understanding of that subject didn't begin in the year 1930 or 1940 or 1950.

**MR. MCSWAIN:** I grant you that children, human beings, have the same biological patterns, and yet, each one differs psychologically. Learning is a process of growth, and I don't see how you are unwilling to grant to these children better instructional



methods based on what we have come to find out about how they learn.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I am not unwilling to grant better instructional methods. I am for them. I am saying just because you change something, that doesn't mean that it is better. There isn't anyone who is unwilling to grant better instructional methods than you have.

MR. HELM: I understand there is some change-back in the schools to having more drill. I gathered that, at least, from things I have heard. I know of a certain parent of one child who was not taught spelling in a thorough manner and now in the fifth or sixth grade he is just beginning to learn to spell and is being put back into drills in spelling. Now, sometimes these psychological methods or modern studies aren't always too good. Many people think that in the old, one-room school in the country they got things and learned things that stuck with them by hearing repetition from other grades—drill, drill, drill.

### Drill Important'

MR. MCBURNEY: We have had the question raised of teaching the fundamentals and methods of doing it best. We seem to be agreed that drill in spelling, in reading, in writing and as Mr. Michael would add, in speaking is an important factor. We want students to get these fundamentals. The issue seems to be how best to accomplish it, and there very clearly is a difference of opinion on that. Doubtless, the competence with which this job is done would differ from school to school and teacher to teacher.

MR. HELM: I think we all agree on the importance of teaching fundamentals, and there is hope. In fact, we are studying, and different opinions are being brought forth, and sooner or later we will probably reach a more perfect method.

MR. MCBURNEY: Helm, I want to ask you about another criticism directed against the public school, the charge that they are not doing an adequate job in teaching citizenship, American

culture, and building loyalty to the nation and our way of life. Do you share that view?

MR. HELM: I have a feeling the fault comes from above, from some national associations, and their policies, their influence on the average teacher who feels he must follow and do as he is ordered or perhaps he will not be advanced in the profession. It is due also to the teaching of history more as a social science which gives a chance to bring in certain, what we might call social Marxian ideas. Some of the materials used in the schools question the loyalty and sincerity of our forefathers when they started the Constitution, suggesting they did so more to protect themselves and land gambling. That criticism is taught in some of the debunking series. It seems to me right now if we allow no religious propaganda in our schools, we allow no political propaganda in our schools—or should not, although the National Education Association, certain phases of it, have even asked teachers to work against men who wouldn't favor certain federal aid bills; I know that for certain—then why should we allow anti-American propaganda aimed at the abolition of private property and other fundamental institutions of our Republic to be carried on? I would like to make this one statement.

MR. MCBURNEY: Do you suggest that is going on in the schools?

### Concern For Propaganda

MR. HELM: I think it is true from inferences through the textbooks, the things I read myself, the impressions I get, what many parents tell me, letters I get because people know I am interested, through Friends of Public Schools, even though the interest is not professional. They are worried.

MR. MCBURNEY: Do you other men think this is the case?

MR. MICHAEL: I have never heard associated with the National Education Association or any other professional organization at a national

level the power and influence that Mr. Helm would associate therewith. I don't think there is any question that educators are very much concerned about this whole problem of citizenship education. There has never been a time when we were giving more time and more attention and thought and study to it. All of us, I think, recognize that if there is one primary function in America today, it is to save our freedom, and that the responsibility of the public school as the most effective institution in America today for the training of youth has that as its primary purpose and objective.

### 'Cling to Tradition'

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I think what Mr. Michael has just said is very heart warming, and it is fine. However, it comes a little bit late. The educators have not been on the job, and by that I am referring not to our teachers in elementary schools who have to take what is dished down to them from up above, from the educators of educators. I want to make the point that they haven't been given the proper guidance. You find in a textbook, a teacher's textbook, given to me by one of the most eminent educators in the country, such statements in deriding classical education as—now he is referring to children, and I quote: If they use the traditional methods of instruction, "They are not likely to become explorers, nor are they apt to like to live dangerously. They may choose the guidance of tradition, of authoritarian conclusions, and of complacency so long that they grow to deride change. They flee from revolution or even obvious evolution and cling to the institutions that change little or not at all. They thus lose their freedom, becoming slaves of existing conditions and cowards of the future, for free men are revolutionary men in thought and dynamic men in action." Now, that is the kind of doctrine that is historically wrong. We had two revolutions in this country under the traditional system of education. The second thing that is

wrong with that is that we have in this country certain traditions which are not subject to re-examination, that we want to adhere to. This system, this belief, sponsored largely by John Dewey and his radical progressive schools, starting out with the desire to recognize Russia, that we can examine every fundamental of this country, is wrong! It has resulted in the greatest batch of treason trials we have ever had!

MR. MCSWAIN: That is a rather broad generalization that you have made, Christensen. I have read Dewey's writings very carefully. I don't believe that Dewey supported what you are saying there. You picked out an excerpt from a chapter. Dewey believes in the power of intelligence. He believes in critical thinking as a way of solving the problems of today. He believes in experimentalism, yet experimentalism supported by moral values, mental values, and I cannot see why people want to tie in many of the problems that they say exist in the schools with one of America's outstanding philosophers whose concept of life, concept of mental development, concept of society, it seems to me, is tied right in with the very basic principles of American democracy.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: And Mr. Dewey also believes there is no God.

MR. MCSWAIN: I deny that!

MR. CHRISTENSEN: Well, he has joined countless atheistic groups. He is joint founder of the Ingersoll Memorial.

### 'More Than Knowledge'

MR. MICHAEL: Going back to the teaching of citizenship again, I think we are all impressed with the fact that knowledge in itself will never transfer to the behavior of a good citizen. It is more than just knowing. It is a matter of also doing, and so our emphasis—increasingly in the school—is to give the student the chance actually to experience the ways of behaving democratically as well as to know facts about our history, our past and the like, as important as they are.



MR. HELM: I would like to emphasize the fact that this is a different period, we all know, from any we have ever lived in before. With Russia threatening, as she is, we have to do something serious to develop the nation of the future now in the schools into an enthusiastic, loyal, supporting group. I believe on account of that, this one subject transcends all others and not to neglect the fundamentals. That must be kept, as it has been. But it adds a new story to the structure of education, I might say, in which every superintendent and every teacher and every parent must rally around to see that the children get the right idea of American government, and to that end, these textbooks should be eliminated or changed.

MR. MCBURNEY: What textbooks?

MR. HELM: Those referred to that bring in the idea of debunking, and saying through the schools we will bring a new social order. I have plenty of them here. I could give more. It is well known that such books exist and are used in the schools. Now, I blame businessmen or people who feel as I do for not assisting teachers, who want to avoid the text, in having the texts issued. I would like to call upon the listening public right now to rally to the fact we must do something to get proper textbooks into the schools as well as cutting others out.

### Responsibility of Community

MR. MICHAEL: I certainly would emphasize here the responsibility at the local community level, the local citizens who see that what is being taught in the school is understood. I don't know of any school where parents are not welcomed to review with the administration and with teachers the instructional materials which are there. We recognize certainly that schooling is not synonymous with education, that we can't get citizenship education until we get the students in the community to participate in the life and functioning of community life. They are all tied in very closely together.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I want to emphasize that. Now, I am a member of a board of education, and we have very little direct contact with the parents that we are supposed to represent. I think that the criticism that parents don't take enough interest in the schools—that is, effective interest by visiting the schools and then by going to their local boards of education and voicing their complaints, if they have them—is a valid criticism.

MR. MCBURNEY: The suggestion has been made here in discussing this matter of teaching citizenship that our textbooks are loaded with socialistic doctrine, that we are getting bad advice from the teachers of teachers and as a result presumably we are turning out young men and women who are less loyal, less informed about the culture and tradition of America. I know McSwain doesn't subscribe to that point of view.

### Textbooks

MR. MCSWAIN: No, I do not subscribe to it. I am not saying there may not be one, two or three textbooks in which you could find something you would question, but as I know schools from having visited in them widely in this country for the last 27 years, teachers are trying honestly to help children understand the basic principles of democratic citizenship. They are trying to help them think about contemporary problems on the basis of their ability to interpret through thinking and critical reading. They are trying to help children to see what democracy has contributed in this country and to help them establish a firm faith in our democratic government. It seems to me that when we are too eager to throw out our textbooks or say certain textbooks cannot be used, we are denying our children the opportunity to get information on both sides of a problem and under the guidance of a critical teacher to think it through. I think you can learn as much that is good about our institutions by learning what other people say is the negative.

MR. MCBURNEY: Of course, Christensen has been saying here rather effectively, it seems to me, that there are certain things that should not be examined critically. There are certain basic things that should be taught, I take it on an exhortative basis, certain verities which should not be questioned.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: That is correct. I take it the one fundamental difference we can all agree upon between our system which I call Western Christian democracy and the Russian system is the belief in the divinity of man. I realize very well the problems that confront any public school in getting into spiritual values, but they must be there. I think the McCollum decision by the Supreme Court is very unfortunate; the dissent is right. Mr. Frankfurter's opinion is wrong historically. It is an interesting bit of legal gymnastics. That is about all you can say for it. Spiritual values are largely absent in our instruction. Go back to the earliest laws you had: "Man doth not live by bread alone." Our children are getting no such spiritual guidance. They are having educators that are saying such things as: "Education has now become the chief problem of the world. It's one great holy cause." Now, what kind of muddled thinking can use that word "holy" in there? That is what has been wrong with so many of our teachers and of teachers' teachers—and I am excluding Dean McSwain.

### 'Develop Ethical Values'

MR. MCSWAIN: That's all right. I am not bothered about your accusations, but the word "education" being of many definitions, and I think your use of the term there is quite broad, would include in it the teaching of religion, the teaching of ethical values. I share with you the view that any sound democratic citizenship must be supported by a belief in the Divine Being. At the same time, our schools as I know them are struggling hard to help these children develop ethical values, learn respect for themselves, consideration for and respect for the

truth, and honesty of thought, integrity with reference to the rights of other people; but if you are going to bring in this matter of religious education, when it comes to a matter of creed, then I think you are going to have to throw your accusations also at the home and the church. The school alone cannot do everything, it seems to me, you are asking the schools to do here today.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I agree. The homes and the churches must do more than they have done.

### Citizenship Education

MR. MICHAEL: Going back again to our citizenship education, I think if there is one thing the school is trying desperately hard to do, it is to respect the dignity and the worth of the individual student. That is certainly basic, Christensen, in what you have said is the difference between our way of life and that being promoted by Russia today. If we accept that, as I say basic in our thinking about citizenship education in the classroom and in the whole environment of the school—and I think increasingly in the home and in the community—I believe we are developing our basic approach to citizenship education.

MR. MCSWAIN: I appreciate the points of view that we are hearing from business men and leaders in other civic organizations. We must recognize we will have in the next ten years 39 million children in our schools, and what we want them to have in the way of good sound education is the concern of every one in the community. Let's be big enough to put our differences on the table and look at them on the basis of facts rather than wide general accusations.

MR. HELM: I for one don't think anything I have said about the citizenship matter is a wide general accusation. I have proof of my statements. I think the thing to do—and I am encouraged by what you men have said agreeing on the importance of citizenship—is the checking up of textbooks and is the giving to teachers the



suggestions and guide books that will keep them from straying off into these criticisms that are unfair.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I want to make a suggestion. Elementary education is basic. It starts the child out in life. Today it is largely teaching that is dominated by women. We are not today paying salaries that will enable a man to support a wife and children and earn his living teaching school to children. I don't know whether the taxpayers in my district are going to like it or not, but we must do something by way of raising salaries so that we can bring more men into the education of children. I don't mean by that federal aid to education. We don't want thought control from Washington by a bunch of bureaucrats.

### Teachers' Salaries

MR. MCBURNEY: We are asking the schools to teach fundamentals more effectively, to teach citizenship more effectively, to teach morals and ethics more effectively and here we have a member of a board of education saying that we are not paying teachers living wages. There are extenuating factors unquestionably.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: We are paying women pretty good salaries, but you have got to work out something so men can come into the profession and will come into the elementary schools.

MR. HELM: Enough salary to take care of a family.

MR. MCSWAIN: I would certainly underwrite what Christensen said about the importance of elementary schools and what it does for children during the impressionable years. We need competent, alert, keen-minded teachers. We cannot get many of the young men and women, especially men, to enter the elementary field unless we have better salaries and, so, Christensen, unless we have a recognition from the public that it is an important job to do.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I agree with you whole-heartedly. I don't mean to ex-

clude women. The schools need the influence of both men and women teachers.

MR. MICHAEL: I am very much interested in what Mr. Christensen says. I am sure he is aware of the problem of recruitment of teachers in the United States. Certainly the financial aspects are very, very important. I would emphasize again what Dean McSwain says, that in addition to that, teachers are particularly concerned about their status in community life, the acceptance of the job which we think they are doing in behalf of our way of life.

### Teachers' Status

MR. HELM: It occurs to me one of the things we can all do is to glorify the profession. Show to men who are considering life work and wondering what they are to do, that the field of teaching probably has no superior. I was in it 15 years. I felt it a duty, just as much a call as going into the ministry. I think if we can unite on that, some policy whereby we can glorify the profession, and hold it out to young men as well as young women, we will be performing the function that is as important as almost anything else.

MR. MCBURNEY: To what extent do the problems you attribute to the schools reflect the weaknesses and tensions in the home and local, state and national community?

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I think the schools, certainly in the position of leadership, should avoid a lot of tensions we have. They come from the confusion that has existed in educational sources in large measure.

MR. MICHAEL: On the other hand, Mr. Christensen, I don't think there is any question that too many of us are willing to let many of the failures fall on contemporary education when they are ultimately failures of our society as a whole.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: Well, society is a problem of education. . . .

# Suggested Readings

Compiled by Eugen Eisenlohr  
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,  
Deering Library, Northwestern University.



MITCHELL, LUCH (Sprague) (Mrs. Wesley Clair Mitchell). *Our Children and Our Schools*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1950.

An analysis of the way in which today's teachers are meeting the challenge of new knowledge and new cultural needs.

*American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Second Yearbook, 1949.* p. 21-5. "Professional Leadership in Parent-Teacher Education." E. T. McSWAIN.

If the schools are to build informed, disciplined minds there should be more professional leadership in parent-teacher education.

*Atlantic* 186:53-57, J1., '50. "How Do You Test a Student?" F. D. ASHBURN.

Includes some interesting points on the need to make education more difficult and stimulating for the relatively few who are able students.

*Christian Science Monitor Magazine* p. 1+, Jan. 8, '51. "Schools in 1951: Spiritual Leaven at Work." M. TAYLOR.

The individual child and what can be done to help him find himself is at the heart of education in free lands.

*Education Digest* 15:15-21, Oct., '49. "Is the American High School Serving Today's Youth?" P. GRIM and V. ANDERSON.

Tabulations of questions and answers submitted to 271 students from a number of large city schools and to authorities on modern secondary education, with a comparison of the conclusions reached.

*Education Digest* 15:42-5, Oct., '49. "Public Relations for Public Education." E. L. BERNAYS.

The chaos in our educational system and a suggestion for its remedy through more effective relations between the schools and the general public.

*Elementary School Journal* 51:177-81, Dec., '50. "Today's Challenge to Educational Leadership." M. F. SEAY.

Three steps needed to meet today's challenge of a rapidly changing world.

*Life* 29:46-7, Oct. 16, '50. "Our Schools Have Kept Us Free." H. S. COMMAGER.

Professor Commager stresses that many of the failures we ascribe to the schools are failures of society as a whole, and that Americans need to return to fundamental principles and sound moral values.

*National Association of Secondary School Principals. Bulletin* 34:199-204, Mar., '50. "What Is the Professional Opportunity of Secondary-School Principals for Leadership in Parent-Teacher Education?" E. T. McSWAIN.

Basic considerations for good parent-teacher relationships which can mean that both the school and the home will do a better job in educating American children.



*National Education Association Journal* 39:701-02, Dec., '50. "Obligations of Opportunity." J. W. MAUCKER.

The President of Iowa State Teacher's College in his inaugural address described education in the U. S. today and stressed the need for more Americans to appreciate the social significance of educational opportunity.

*National Education Association Journal* 39:689, Dec., '50. "Let's Lift Their Rights." W. S. VINCENT.

High schools are experimenting with teaching about the schools in the classrooms to ensure a greater understanding of the educational job ahead and how it is to be accomplished.

*Nation's Schools* 44:21-3, Aug., '49. "Priorities in Education for the Cold War Years." E. T. McSWAIN.

*Progressive Education* 27:138-9, Mar., '50. "President's Page: A Question about Progress in Elementary Education." K. D. BENNE.

The search for an answer to the problems of the elementary and secondary school caught in a crisis in culture.

*Saturday Review of Literature* 33:9-10+, Sept. 9, '50. "Education and the Defense of America." E. O. MELBY.

The Dean of the School of Education of New York University shows that a renewed democracy, vitalized at the community level through a mobilization of total community resources is the dynamic we need in education for freedom.

*School and Society* 72:58, Jl. 22, '50. "Where Is the American Faith in Education?"

Educational conditions of 1950.

*School and Society* 72:193-5, Sept. 23, '50. "Functions of Secondary Education in the United States."

A statement of policy by the National Council of Independent Schools.

*School and Society* 72:314, Nov. 11, '50. "Crisis in the Schools." I. L. KANDEL.

Emphasizes that "as is the teacher, so is the school."

*The School Executive* 1:7, Sept., '50. "The School Year—1950-51." W. D. COCKING.

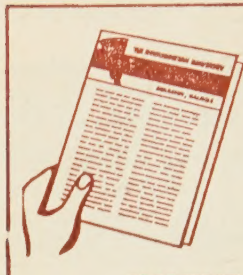
Because he feels that the result of the struggle of ideas will depend largely on what is taught in our schools, Mr. Cocking suggests specific educational problems needing emphasis in 1950-51.

*School Executive* 70:45-46, Oct., '50. "Education's Era of Reformation." E. E. WILSON.

An analysis of the educational revolution which has taken place in the first two quarters of the 20th century, of the reasons for present unrest in the educational field, and of the outlook for the future. "Will education adjust . . . to current philosophy, psychology, research and social trends, or will it revert to nineteenth-century patterns?"

*School Executive* 70:79, Oct., '50. "The Importance of the Three R's Today." I. A. MITCHELL.

The Director of Elementary Education in Wilmington, Delaware, discusses the three R's of education in relation to mankind's need for a recognition of values.



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20. Can We Maintain a Bipartisan Foreign Policy?
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22. Can We Control Divorce?
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22. Is the United Nations the World's Best Hope for Peace in 1951?
23. How Should Christians Look at War?
24. The Function of Criticism in a National Emergency.
25. America's Role in Southeast Asia.
26. What Should the University Stand For?

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